

B. K. Thakore



The sculpture reproduced on the endpapers depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Shuddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha.

Below them, is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A. D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

Makers of Indian Literature

B. K. Thakore

Shirish Panchal



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CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Life and Personality	7
3.	B. K. Thakore's Poetry	22
4.	B. K. Thakore's' Literary Criticism	39
5.	Other Works by B. K. Thakore	50
6.	Conclusion	54
7.	Bibliography	56

1.

INTRODUCTION

The period between 1880 A-D and 1915 A-D is generally known as 'The Age of Pundits' or 'Pundit Yug' in the history of Gujarati literature. The history of many other Indian literatures also has such periods. It is somewhere around the beginning of this age that the first generation of young Indian scholars educated in the universities of Bombay and Calcutta was beginning to exert its influence in the fields of life and literature; they wanted to give a new direction.

The great luminaries of Gujarati literature and culture viz. 'Kalapi', Manibhai Dwivedi, Ramanbhai Nilakanth, Narsimhrao Divetia, Manishanker Bhatt 'Kant', Kavi Nanalal, Anandshanker Dhruv, Balavantrai Thakore, Gowardhanram Tripathi belonged to this age. On the one hand this generation was well conversed with English literature and western thought and on the other hand they inherited the rich traditions of Sanskrit literature. Moreover they had genuine love and respect for medieval Gujarati literature and they tried to extend the traditions of this literature in their own way. The creative writers and thinkers of Pundit Yug were quite different from each other and sometimes they opposed each other. Each of these writers had cultivated a distinct style, each scaled new literary heights and left his individual mark on Gujarati literature.

Among the writers of this age, 'Kalapi' is noted for his impassioned personal effusions in poetry, Manibhai Dwivedi for his deep philosophical thought, Ramanbhai Nilkanth for his reformatory zeal, Kavi Nanalal for his beautiful lyric poetry, Gowardhanram Tripathi for his all the time great four volume novel 'Saraswatichandra' and Manishanker Bhatt 'Kant' for bringing about a total change in the sensibility and the diction of Gujarati poetry. It is well-known that B. K. Thakore insisted not only on thought, but on that thought which is rich in poetic meaning. His sonnets and literary criticism, chief contributions to Gujarati literature, indicate

clearly the importance of poetic meaning.

The publication of Kavi Dalapatram's (father of Kavi Nanalal) 'Bapani Pipar' in 1845 A.D. marks the beginnings of the modern Gujarati literature; Narmad's essay 'Mandali Malavathi Thata Labh' (The benefits of assembling together) is the first notable work of modern prose; the first novel 'Karanaghelo' written by Nandashanker Mehta was published in 1866 A.D. These works can claim no more than only a historical importance. But the works written in the 80s and the ones that followed them were quite different from the preceding period. The poets of 'Sudharak Yug' (Reformation Period) had more or less cut themselves off from medieval Gujarati literature. They wanted to change the society with the help of literature and many times they opted for propagandist literature.

The poets of Pundit Yug refrained themselves consciously from assigning such a dull and limited task to creative literature. But Ramanbhai Nilkanth was a glaring exception here. In his noted dramatic work 'Raino Parvat', he blantly took upon himself the task of furthering the cause of social reform. Again, excepting Gowardhanram Tripathi's monumental work 'Saraswatchandra', the writers of this age evince a total neglect of such a protean form of literature as the novel. But the rich crop of poetry of this age compensated this loss.

The minor poets such as Kalapi and the major ones such as Nanalal, Kant and Balwantrai Thakore wove rich poetic web of this age and also charted out newer ways for its development in the succeeding periods. Each of the ways was unique one. For example, the history of Gujarati literature knows no immediate successor to Nanalal. But the sixties saw the reincarnation and rejuvenation of the song. Poets like Ramesh Parekh and Anil Joshi infused the song with the elements borrowed from folk songs and thus furthered a tradition which was so dear to Nanalal. Similarly Balwantrai Thakore finds no immediate follower of his poetic diction which was singularly arid, farfetched. But his bold experiments with metrical form have continued to influence Gujarati poetry as long as four decades after the end of Pundit yug.

Men of letters of this period were basically all thinkers and their first concern was with certain basic human values and problems. Hence we can not fail to discuss this or that philosophical thought lurking at the

base of their creative works. Their immediate predecessors like Narmad did not care to dive deep into religious thinking, though he had written a book like 'Dharmvichar'. But Anandshankar Dhruv and Manibhai Dwivedi were thoroughly steeped in the rich tradition of Indian thought and culture; they elucidated Sanatan Ved Dharma in their own way. Ramanbhai Nilkanth and Manishanker Bhatt 'Kant' were deeply influenced by Christianity and western philosophy. Prof. Thakore always declared himself as non-religious man leaning towards agnosticism. But he had experimented 'Japa' and meditation at a later stage of his life. His poetry too shows his latent fascination for the ultimate divine goal of life, experience of unity with the supreme absolute; as a result of this change, he sought peace in the Atman.

The revolutionary thought of Modernism separates the writers of the Pundit Yug from those belonging to the sixties and afterwards. Critics and Pundits have now been busy trying to redefine modernism and also traditional literature in the light of the questions raised by post modernism. Certain literary and cultural values not quite compatible with Indian values begin to creep in the literary and cultural atmosphere of India. Hence many of the contemporary writers and thinkers have taken upon themselves the task of searching for and redefining the Indian identity. This search for the essential Indianness or Indian identity really began in Gujarat with the stalwarts of the Pundit Yug; they devoted themselves to the study of Sanskrit literature and the rich tradition of Indian Philosophy beginning with the Vedas. Most of the medieval Gujarati poets belonged to very common strata of society. Hence it was hardly possible for them to be in living touch with Sanskrit literature. Various historical circumstances prevailing at the time only helped to aggravate the situation for them. Consequently Sanskrit language and literature remain neglected well upto the first three decades of the second half of the last century. It is at the onset of the Pundit Yug that things began to change for the better.

The pundits were convinced that a meaningful search for Indian identity must really begin with a serious study of Sanskrit literature. Kalapi and Manibhai Dwivedi came under the influence of sufism. It is no wonder that as a result of their first hand acquaintance with Sanskrit, English and Persian literatures, the writers of the Pundit Yug began to nurse serious doubts against certain western values which had started

creeping in our minds and culture at that time.

A number of novels were written and published in the preceding period. But most of them were simply romances. In many cases they were only free transliterations of English romances into Gujarati by Parsi writers. The pace of this activity slows down remarkably in the Pundit Yug. And translations of Sanskrit classics began to appear in Gujarati. In 1898 while writing his preface of *Saraswatichandra* - 3, Govardhanram Tripathi says :

'While keeping in mind a total picture of our people, our times, our manners, morals and the problems that we face today, this novel aims especially at presenting an imaginative and colourful picture of the forthcoming generations in a similar way.'

It is very interesting to note that one of the great historians, Shri. V. K. Rajawade, had also complained about Marathi Novel in 1902.

'The flaw is that they are not genuine products of our own creations. Our soul, our character, our spirit, our aspirations, our ideals are not to be found in these imitations, these quests, these adopted children... The real problem with our realists is their total lack of knowledge of the history of our own art, its traditions, its literary treasures, its essence. Consequently they are ill equipped to discriminate between the literary giants and those dwarfish charlatans whom they choose to imitate.'

Hence we can discern in those writers a carefully cultivated tendency of incorporating what is best in Sanskrit literature in their works. Moreover, there began to appear some works which really belonged to our native soil and which seriously dealt with the social reality. As a result of this there was a noticeable change in the medium and the concepts of literature; not only this, there was an increased insistence on its aesthetic quality. This change was above all so qualitative in nature that the works written and published in *Sudharak Yug* i.e. only two or three decades ago, seem to belong to a distant past.

We have already referred to the conflict between the East and the West that characterized the intellectual climate of the period. Anandshankar Dhruv who had been the Mayor of Andheri, Mumbai and had served as the vice chancellor of the Benares Hindu Vishva Vidyalaya for some time at the insistence of Mahatma Gandhiji and Manilal

Nabhubhai Dwivedi whose scholarship earned him an international acclaim (Mr. Edwin Arnold had written about him : 'Nor does Poona or Mumbai contain any shastree, with clearer conclusions on Hindu theology and philosophy, better command of lucid language or ideas more enlightened and profound than Mr. Manilal Dwivedi, Professor of Sanskrit at the Samaldas College here - Bhavnagar, whose book just published on Rajayoga ought to become widely known in Europe and to converse with whom has been a real privilege') were staunch advocates of vedic religious thought; of course they were not fanatics. Many others like Ramanbhai Nilakanth adopted a more or less compromising middle position and tried to achieve a happy synthesis of the East and the West. And they had the right frame of mind for undertaking the task they had set upon themselves.

They had the mental equipoise and rationality of approach for example, they were not unaware of the fact that the traditional Hinduism had amassed a lot of dross in the course of centuries and the society of the preceding period were impelled by their zeal for social reform. The writers of the Pundit Yug had comparatively a broader spectrum. They sincerely attempted to go into roots of the rich traditions of literature, culture and religion with a view to arrive at a definition of our Indian identity which is more meaningful and relevant in the present context. This was their first and last recourse against the cultural invasion of the west, their ultimate answer to the problems raised and the challenges posed by the west.

Mahatma Gandhi was beginning to be a dominating force in Gujarat and in the whole of India when he launched his noncooperation movement in 1920. He lived and died for certain eternal values like truth, nonviolence and love. Gandhian thought was not merely an academic exercise, not a dull, dry and abstract speculation of an armchair thinker. Mahatma's prime concern was the largest good of the last man standing at the base of social ladder. And therefore he rejected western technology and insisted on Indian rural and traditional ways of production. This is not the place to discuss Gandhian philosophy even in a nutshell. But its essentials can be traced back to Pundit Yug. With his deep-rooted love for Hindu religion and the Indian ways of life, Mahatma Gandhi encouraged the Indian people to fight against the western view of life.

Balwantrai Thakore did not come under Gandhiji's influence at least in the beginning. Nevertheless he accepted that the individualistic, materialistic and the hedonistic ways of life have caused untold harm to our culture and people. Like many other writers of the age, B. K. Thakore was convinced that the values we must accept or reject in our literature and criticism can never be different from those we must accept or reject in life.

Now a considerably long period separates us from Pundit Yug and we are celebrating the one hundred and twenty fifth birth anniversaries of B. K. Thakore and Mahatma Gandhiji; but we find the western influence reaching newer heights today. Some people feel that upon the way of life western influence had not encroached to this extent before independence; and now we are adopting a more servile attitude. Therefore what the writers of Pundit Yug strove for becomes all the more relevant to us now. We are living in an age of the explosion of information. Education has become a widespread phenomenon. But our present generation does not show the concern for sincerity, integrity, studiousness. The writers of Pundit Yug committed themselves to these values.



2.

LIFE AND PERSONALITY

It is a happy coincidence that both Mohandas K. Gandhi and Balwantrai K. Thakore were born in October 1869, the former in Porbander and later in Bharuch. Both of them have enriched Gujarati literature in their own way. Balwantrai Thakore's father was a teacher at Bharuch and Junagadh, but he left teaching and became a lawyer. B. K. Thakore's great grandfather Anuprai was an officer in army of the Scindias. So B. K. Thakore wrote under the pen-name 'Sehni' (Senani or military officer). But he disowned that pen-name afterwards. He also wrote under another pen-name 'Valkal'. After his first schooling in Bharuch, he went to Rajkot where he became acquainted with Navalram Pandya, a contemporary of Narmad; Mahatma Gandhi and Manishanker Bhatt 'Kant'. While studying at Rajkot, he came under the influence of Christianity. In his mature age he appreciated certain principles of Islam also. Hence, we can say that Balwantrai Thakore was a rationalist, impartial and non-communal person.

As a student he was very bright. He learnt Sanskrit from Manibhai Dwivedi, a great scholar and thinker. He composed poetry in Sanskrit and got an award for his essay on a historical topic. He began to nurse a desire for going abroad but he did not get such an opportunity. He became a little perturbed when Gandhiji went to England. Afterwards he got an opportunity to go abroad but he could not go as he lost his wife and he had to bear the responsibility of bringing up his children. But he compensated this desire by reading books by western authors. His father had taken a great care in educating him and helped him to develop a habit of reading books over and above those prescribed in the curriculum. It is in this way that Balwantrai learnt his first basic lesson of an ideal teacher - to encourage the students to cross the narrow and arbitrary limits of the prescribed syllabus and look up to the distant horizons beyond. The conscientious father also taught his son the first basic lessons of life - that is living one's life honestly, independently and fearlessly. It does not mean that other

scholars of Pundit Yug lacked these sterling qualities of character. But B. K. Thakore was known for his undaunted character and he always expressed his views and convictions, even if they hurt others. He was not a man of compromises.

B. K. Thakore got married with Chandramani at the age of 18. He was brought up in a religious atmosphere but that atmosphere did not affect this rational minded person. In his early childhood he agreed to wear a sacred thread but he refused to perform the religious rites when his wife Chandramani became pregnant for the first time. In all probability there was nothing special or exotic about the conjugal life of the young couple. He was aware of the limitations of his wife. He accepted the reality without being carried away by romantic thoughts and expectations. Balwantrai Thakore had not written anything in his diary about this topic, hence we do not know about him as a husband. But a few of his jottings do refer to the shortcomings of his wife e. g. 'while reading Bhavabhooti myself am reading Gujarati fourth reader with Chandramani reading and talking all round it and of all sorts of things are even casually suggested or anyhow brought in just to chat away to open her mind to widen her sympathies to accustom her to exercise her imagination, her observation, her thinking.'

Balwantrai Thakore was not immuned to the influences of the west but his approach to the problems of life and literature was essentially Indian. Hence he thoughtfully carved out a way to live with his wife. Similarly he withstood the lure of Christianity and Islam as he had a firm faith in the excellence of Hinduism. His basic tend here is स्वधर्मे निघनं श्रेयः He was not quite happy when his friend Manishanker Bhatt 'Kant' accepted Christianity though he did not disown his friendship on that account.

The relation between the life of a creative writer and his works can never be simple and direct. But it is equally true that his basic approach to the problems of life and society, and at least a few of his personal and emotional experiences may directly or indirectly be woven in his creative works. Balwantrai Thakore's sonnet-sequence 'Premno Divas' (Day of love) has been hailed as his major contribution to Gujarati Poetry. It delineates some highly personal experiences and delicate moments in the life of an imaginary young couple. We may not go to the

extent of reading Thakore's own personal experience in each of the sonnets. But they do bear a testimony to the fact that the poet was deeply aware of the complexities and mysteries of love. We find an interesting entry in his diary dated 9-7-1888.

'Love is certainly lawless, wilful, blind, omnipotent, tyrannical or whatever you will. Its course is certainly inseparable. It does not spring from a perception of worthlessness or worse does not and can not remove it. It is distinct from gratitude, affection, admiration, worship or anything else, only the object of your love, even though the most vicious the most despicable, does not become the object of your hatred or contempt.'

His diaries and his recorded conversations with friends make it clear that he was a liberal minded person and he sided with those working for social reforms. Hence he was opposed to the tradition of imposing compulsory widowhood on women. With the passage of time his views on education and problems of women began to acquire a definite shape. The cause of women was very clear to the hearts of the writers of this age. They voiced their views on women's education, their place in society and other related matters. Ramanbhai Nilkanth expressed his views on the sorry state of the woman through the characters of his celebrated drama 'Raino Parvat' Kumudsundari, the heroine of 'Saraswatichandra' is a young woman of exceptional genius. Gowardhanram Tripathi took an opportunity to describe the position of the woman while developing his character. Nanalal Kavi presented a picture of an ideal conjugal love in his verse plays. Balwantrai Thakore had neither any medium, nor character to express his views on the woman except his diaries. We can only have an idea of his views on the subject only from his sonnet 'Premno Divas'.

Balwantrai Thakore shares his firm conviction with his predecessors and contemporaries that the only solution to the problems of the woman lies in imparting education to them. There is simply no other way out. B. K. Thakore happens to read J. S. Mill's 'Subjection of women' and fully agrees with his views; B. K. Thakore says :

'It is enough for a woman to be a perfect house wife, to take care of furniture of the house, to cook food for the family and to look after the social responsibility of the family. This work in itself is of great importance for her. It will also be a source for her happiness and for the development of her personality. Again this work is of great economic significance and

equally of a great social usefulness.

It may appear from this that B. K. Thakore would wish to confine women within the four walls of the house. And of course he is not a fanatic advocate of the woman's lib movement. Here we can not afford to discuss this problem in detail. But will the use of expressions like 'chairperson', 'Human being is a social animal' instead of 'chairman' and 'Man is a social animal' make women liberated? The modern method of using both the genders can be found in B. K. Thakore's writing as early as 1946.

'He (she) can take it in his /her stride'

(Vividh Vyakhyano - 3/183)

The position of the woman can not be improved by such methods in our country. Many universities in India are offering courses specially designed for young girls. B. K. Thakore was among the first few in those days who advocated courses for girls right from primary schools to the universities. But even designing and offering special courses for girls and establishing special educational institutions for them, would not serve the purpose. The education which we get at home is certainly far more valuable than what we get from the books. One of the chief factors contributing to the sorry state of education today is the breaking down of our traditional family.

B. K. Thakore is more than willing to accept all the best that western countries have to offer in the fields of arts, science and technology. But at the same time he thinks that the Indian way of life is definitely better than the western one. He is all praise for the tradition of joint families in India. In one of the sonnets of 'Premno Divas' the persona is a woman who comes back from her husband's house to her parent's house and sweet memories of her childhood begin to surge in her mind and overwhelm her whole being.

बेठी खाटे फरि वळि बघे मेडियो ओरडामां
दीठां हेते स्मृतिपड बघां ऊकल्यां आप रुडां
माडी मीठी स्मित मधुर ने भव्य मूर्ती पिताजी
दादी वांकी रसिक करती गोष्टिथी बाळ राजी
सूनां स्थानो सजिवन धयां सांभळूं कंठ जुनां,

आचारो कै विविध ढबनां नेत्र ठारे सहूनां
भांडू न्हानां, शिशु समयनां खट मिठां सोबतीओ
तोये अे सौ स्मृति छबि विशे व्यापि ले चक्षु घेरी,
न्हानी मोटी बहुरूपि थती अेक मूर्ती अनेरी
चोरीथी आ दिवस सुधिमां अेवि जामी कलेजे
के कौमारे पण मुज सरे बाळवेशे सहेजे!
बेसी खाटे पियरंघरमां झिंदगी जोड़ सारी
त्यारे जाणी अनहदगती, नाथ मारा, त्हमारी

(I sat upon the charpoy and roamed about quickly from one room into the other. I found memories of my childhood unfolding in my mind one by one. And I began to take in with a loving gaze all that the visions had to offer me. First to appear was my loving mother and the next was the dignified image of my father with the characteristic smile on his face. And I saw my grandmother with her figure stooping low on account of her old age who used to make the children happy with interesting stories. Empty corners and places began to throb with new life and I began to hear old voices and to see strange movements of my younger brothers and sisters; of the sweet and sour companions of my childhood. I saw beautiful young fairies running helter-skelter before my eyes. But I could recognize among them all a strange figure assuming various forms big and small. Strangely speaking this was the figure of my husband who had become so dear to me and who had crept secretly into the recesses of my being in such a way that I began seeing my dear husband as a young boy in the company of my childhood companions.

It is when I sat in my parents house and had a panoramic vision of my childhood; O my husband, I came to know you as I have never known you before!)

The picture that emerges from the lines of this sonnet is essentially that of the Indian family that we can happily come across everywhere in India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Arunachal. The western society has nothing to compare with the harmonious Indian family. And here we find a strange contradiction in B. K. Thakore. He adopts a revolutionary and an iconoclastic stance in literature and literacy criticism. Strangely enough, he finds himself quite comfortable in conforming to the age-old traditions of Indian society and Indian

family. Of course, he does want to improve the lot of the woman in general. This can be deduced from the following three observations of B. K. Thakore :

1. Women can not defend themselves properly because they are used to live in a state of overprotection.
2. Promiscuous tendencies of male do not allow women to live fearlessly.
3. Unbridled procreation is one the causes of the pitiable condition of women.

The western thought developed the ideas of liberty, freedom and consequently the idea of social accountability started to fade up. In countries like India we allowed certain evils. Instead of thinking about other individuals we only concentrated on our individual freedom.

After a mature thought B. K. Thakore decided not to marry again so that he could look after his children. He, who cared so much for keeping up the peace and harmony in the family and sacrificed his personal happiness in the interest of his children, was also a serious critic of the evils that had crept in the traditional Hindu religion.

‘Wage a war to the knife against astrology, the karma theory in itself fatalistic form, ignorant insincere and selfish priests, ostention, vulgar expensiveness, unmeaning traditions and produce a national conscience, an atmosphere of earnestness.’

B. K. Thakore graduated with honours from the Deccan College, Poona. He got the Ellis Scholarship for getting the highest marks in English. When he found out that it was not possible to go to England, he went to Mumbai with a view to appearing at the ICS examination. Here he began getting some money by contributing reviews and articles in the Times of India. Later on he worked as an assistant editor of The Indian Spectator for some time. He went back to Poona and joined again The Deccan College for his M. A. In 1892 he became a fellow of the college. Lokmany Tilak invited him to join his celebrated ‘Maratha’ as an assistant editor but he declined this offer because of political differences with Tilak. In 1893, he was awarded a gold medal for writing a historical essay ‘An account of the first Madhavrao Peshwa’.

But certain circumstances forced him to leave his postgraduate

studies. It seems that this has not created any frustration. He taught History, Economics, Political Science, Logic and Ethics at D. J. Sindh College, Karachi. He also taught at Ajmer, Vadodara, Poona. It is during this period that he became a voracious reader. He read almost each and every book that he could lay his hand upon. The horizons of his knowledge became immensely wide and he acquired a very good mastery over a number of disciplines. As a teacher B. K. Thakore taught Political Science but Politics did not interest him much, he did not involve himself with it. The Indian National Congress had sweeping influence over the Intellectual and the common man at the time. But he did not join the congress party. He was a great admirer of England. And he rightly thought that the progress of the English people owed itself to these values. At the same time he was also aware of the fact that our culture and our people, our economy and our artisans have had bear grave consequences of the British rule; political dominance leads to economic dominance. B. K. Thakore being a man of history, could easily find parallel examples in the histories of other countries. The only solution, according to him, lay in developing the spirit of nationality and adhering to our national identity. At times, he applied himself to problems of wider and more general significance e. g. inter-dependence of man and nature, the ecological balance. He always insisted on maintaining higher standards of poetry. But he did not hesitate to voice some of his views and thoughts in simple, direct and unadorned language in his verses.

कुदरत ने मानवनी जोडी अकमेकथी हसे फूले,
चकवा जोडी अ ज खरी छे, वियोगथी करमाय झुरे.

(Hand in hand, man and nature flower and smile, like a pair of chakravak birds, both pine and perish when separated.)

During the course of time we have realized that the path to India's all around progress lies in the maximum exploitation of her agricultural resources. And agriculture means the life around the rural area. But at that time the problems of urbanisation were not so serious and Gaurishanker Joshi 'Dhumketu', one of the great pioneers of Gujarati short story, was yet to write short stories about the evils of urbanisation, B. K. Thakore grieved to observe :

शहेरो ने शहेरी रोगो ने कंतायेलां रहेरी शन

टूँकां जीवन, निर्बल कलुषित शिथिल बिचारां मन

(Cities and the diseases they harbour, the emalidated bodies of the city folks, with their lives short and minds weak, vitiated and utterly pitiable in consequence.)

Again he was foresighted enough to exhort his countrymen

वनो वसावो, खेडो खेतर, रचो वाडियो, पशु पाळो
खातर बीज ऋतू चारा धरतीना भेद पुरा न्हाळो
नदियो सांधो, कूपो गाळी, समुद्र वारि मिष्ट करो

(Work for afforestation, till lands, tend orchards, take care of animals; understand the secrets of earth like fertilizers, seeds and seasons, interlink all the rivers to, filter the wells and desalinate the sea water.)

It is very noteworthy that during the seventies we have been thinking a well developed water grid by interlinking northern and southern Indian rivers and also desalination of the seawater.

Though he was always thinking about the welfare of Gujarat State and India, he did not confine himself within narrow provincialism or nationalism. On the contrary he always criticised weaknesses of Gujarati people and Indian people. During his stay in Poona from 1914 to 1924 he came into contact with Maharashtrians and he was quite impressed by their qualities such as scholarship, meticulousness, thrift, simplicity and love for music, old customs - traditions. B. K. Thakore was grieved at the sorry fact that Gujaratis lacked in these qualities. He was also unhappy to note that Gujarati people are not fond of reading books while Maharashtrian and Bengali people are fond of reading books. In the preface to the collection of his poems 'Bhanakar', he says :

'Our people are so deficient in true learning that the number of people who love and read books of literature hardly seems to increase. And that tantamounts to a great obstacle for our literature and our men of letters.'

It was unfortunate that the denizens of Poona could not really understand and appreciate a multifaceted personality like B. K. Thakore. Derogatory letters went on being published in periodicals like 'Kala', 'Kesari', 'Maratha' - 'What the hell is this Gujarati professor teaching at the Deccan College of Poona.'

B. K. Thakore had to struggle against many odds in life. His wife died at a very young age and he lost two daughters. But he bore the shock of these premature deaths with equanimity. He seemed to have mastered the art of controlling and hiding his emotional perturbances and griefs. And he would never complain about financial difficulties, loneliness, old age and so on to any body. On the contrary he tried to remain active throughout his life: He accepted to deliver two lectures per week at Wilson College of Mumbai even at the age of 80.

Simultaneously he was very much eager to remove certain shortcomings of Gujarati people and to enrich Gujarat, its language and literature. With this aim in mind he prepared a plan for translation of many classics into Gujarati. He thought of publishing some biographies and original works on philosophy with a view of help developing the character of our people. He also wished to commission some competent writers and thinkers for writing books on education, society, culture, religion, history and politics.

Even such a genius and a man of vision had to face a number of difficulties to put his ambitious plan into action. Publishers tended to avoid him, and of course, things have not changed even today. In order to be free from the clutches and exploitations of publishers B. K. Thakore thought of establishing a publishing house of his own, named Balwantrai Sehni Publications Biradari Private Ltd. He was eighty at that time.

'I am not a young chap now. I have not been financially so sound as to bear the expenses of publishing three or four books at a time. Having carefully thought about this situation. I have established the 'B. Sehni Prakashan Biradari Ltd.' the memorandum and articles of association of which states that it is incorporated not for making profits but as a trust fund for encouraging literature. And I hope that it will publish not only my books but also other classics and progressive works with high literary aims and thereby help making the people of Gujarat more practical and careful in the field of literature and be true to its name ('B' Stands for 'bee'). As more and more upcoming and like minded writers come forward with their co-operation, the Biradari will expand its field of activities require more of devotion and dedication. Let my joint director know this.'

Unfortunately B. K. Thakore did not live long enough to put his plan into action, for he died the very next year.

B. K. Thakore was a poet first and teacher next. His first - poem was published in 1886 and his essay on 'Teaching of Tennyson' was published in 1891. He developed a close friendship with the poet 'Kant' during his period. The friendship inspired 'Kant' to write some beautiful poems. Other poets of this period like Narsimhrao Divetia wrote songs and lyrics under the superficial impact of the romantic poets of England. B. K. Thakore had a different conception of poetry and he could not appreciate the type of poetry written by Nanalal and Narsimhrao Divetia. But he could not afford to neglect 'Kant' whom he placed above himself. Read his poem 'Be Kavivar' (Two poets)

करी रहुं कलापि कान्त तणउं आटलूं गौरव
तहमे कवि स्तवी रहो अवर-नर्मदो, न्हानल,
नुसिंह, दलपत्त, बालः स्तवुं वंदु हूं आ ज बे

(I shall continue to appreciate Kant and Kalapi and I shall bow down before these two poets, while you people appreciate Narmad, Nanalal, Narsimhrao, Dalpatram and Balashanker.)

This couplet was written in 1948. It means that, B. K. Thakore stuck to his views till the last years of his life. Again this proves that he was a man of uncompromising attitudes and strong convictions. And he was an unpretentious man who would go a long way in expressing his honest opinions in no uncertain language. In one of his essays he refers to a well-known Sanskrit epigram - which says :

सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न सत्यमप्रियं

(Speak truth, speak what is pleasing, do not speak unpleasant things even if they are true.)

B. K. Thakore observed that 'Literary criticism which shuns saying unpleasant truths is like buttermilk with a lot of water in it, this sort of criticism is practised only with a view to get cheap recognition amongst people and professors, in newspapers and in Universities. There is a well-known Sanskrit saying : we should refrain from doing which is pure but which goes against the wishes and expectations of the common folk. We must never allow this kind of outworn practicability to overpower us and make us silent even when our learning and our experience tend to lead us to a quite a different direction. If this be the case, I request everyone concerned to let this age of transition continue and to let these rebellious

tendencies and disputes continued at least for three decades or so in the interest of Gujarati poetry and the modernity of Gujarati literature and for the cause of humanity and its progress. Let there not be any dearth of such righteous fighting spirit in my Gujarat and in the field of poetic art.'

The central thesis informing the long passage quoted above is B. K. Thakore's insistence on being true to one's own conviction which had become a second nature to him. And it is this insistence that earned him the reputation of being an impolite, an uncompromising and a better critic. He would not rest with criticising only his contemporaries and predecessors. Certain clever and practical critics would criticise their predecessors severely but not those belonging to the younger generations. This is because they know that in the literary world these younger contemporaries would fetch honours, prizes medals for them. In the light of these observations it would be worthwhile to take a note of certain incidents in the life of B. K. Thakore.

B. K. Thakore's 'Bhanakara' and Kant's 'Purvalap' were published in 1917. Ramnarayana Pathak, a well-known short story writer, a poet and a critic, was teaching both these poets at Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad. Umashanker Joshi and Tribhuvandas Luhar, Sundaram were among his students, Umashanker Joshi was quite impressed by B. K. Thakore's poetry and he sent him 'Vishwashanti', a longer poem with a request to send him his opinion. B. K. Thakore wrote a letter not to Umashanker Joshi but to Kakasaheb Kalelakar.

"Dear Kalelakar, do teach your Protege how to write letters. I quote a golden sentence from his letter to me 'I have a right to have your opinion'. Who the hell gave him a right to demand my opinion after all? Mahatma Gandhi ? George the fifth ? Or Lord Brahma ? Thanks to the postal department of the British Government which brings forth heaps of newspapers, periodicals and leaflets every third day at my door. Do all of them have a right to demand my opinion ? Fie on them !" B. K. Thakore must have realised the potentialities of Umashanker Joshi as a poet. Even though he was not prepared to appreciate 'Nishith' written by Umashanker Joshi : 'The age of praising the gods is over, the imitations of those poems without the sincerity of religious feelings of that age are simply artificial heaps of embellishment.' B. K. Thakore believed that the propensity of many Gujarati poems to be set to music had debased it.

For this reason he could not appreciate the poems of Nanalal, Narsimhrao. But it often happens that which holds true with respect to the poems of one poet may not hold good with respect to the poems of another poet, But as B. K. Thakore was free from both prejudices and preferences. Hence if he could not appreciate Nanalal's songs, he could not appreciate Niranjan Bhagat's songs too. Niranjan Bhagat once ventured to recite some songs when he was in his early twenties, B. K. Thakore called his nine years old granddaughter and asked Niranjan Bhagat to recite: 'Well, here is your audience.'

We may note one more episode here. The last of the great poets of medieval Gujarat- Dayaram belonged to a small town named Dabhoi. Once Umashanker Joshi delivered a lecture at Dabhoi in the memory of Dayaram and he told that he had gone there to seek songs from the streets of Dabhoi, when B. K. Thakore came to know about this he advised Umashanker Joshi to be careful enough not to speak such sentimental stuff. Umashanker Joshi afterwards came into very close contact with B. K. Thakore, he wrote about B. K. Thakore's contribution to Gujarati language and literature, very enthusiastically. He accepted : He was stubborn by nature and as a result he would never accept suggestions from others, but many times, he was really to confess and rectify his errors.

But the promising youngsters attained maturity under the very impact of B. K. Thakore were no less untractable than the great man himself. The aged critic had taught them to be completely impartial while evaluating poetry. When B. K. Thakore invited Niranjan Bhagat to express what the younger thought about the elder's poetry, the younger said 'I do not know what to say about your poetry, but Nanalal's poetry is definitely destined to last for a longer time.' The critical atmosphere created and nourished by B. K. Thakore allowed Niranjan Bhagat to express his candid opinion against B. K. Thakore. Mr. Bhagat preferred Nanalal's poetry to B. K. Thakore's poetry but he accepted and welcomed the powerful impact of B. K. Thakore.

But B. K. Thakore who also not free from certain contradictions both in his poetry and in his life. He denounced the song as a low and a worthless form of poetry and looked down upon the poets who wrote songs; yet he himself wrote quite a few songs. He was a strong admirer of traditional Indian culture and yet he liked and chose to dress himself in the western type of clothes.

He was a great admirer of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and T. E. Hulme, though he had not expounded their critical theory or he had written about their poetry; but he had understood the meaning and importance of tradition. So he had translated some Sanskrit classics into Gujarati and he had edited some medieval Gujarati texts. It is a fact that B. K. Thakore was not opposed to lyric poetry or expression of emotions in poetry. What he strongly objected to was sentimentality in poetry or easy, facile expressions of insincere emotions in poetry. In fact he wanted Gujarati poets to reach new heights in poetic expressions. He advised poets :

'O poet, I advise you not to seek the theme of your poems in your own self. Please remember this while writing a poem. Do look at the people at large with love and respect, and thereby forget all your problems, all your personal pleasures and pain.'

Again, inspite of being an agnostic himself, he recommended Sundaram to read Arvind Ghosh's 'A Love and Death.' Perhaps his love for history led him to examine the rich tradition of Indian thought and culture deeply and study the vedas - vedant with meticulous care. In the preface to 'Bhanakara', a collection of his poems he said :

'As Shri. Ambalal Purani has noted I always have had an illdefined fascination for Vedantism. But we all know how in the name of religion, blind faith and superstitions become all powerful; a lot of blood has been shed in the name of religion. The world history is full of records of horrible, cruel incidents; force, jealousy and deceit spread endless tug of wars in the society. Take for instance our age-old tradition of four Varnas. Priests and founders of religions have always been in the forefront of society on account of their cleverness and skillfulness in propaganda work. All these have had a tremendous impact on my opinions and attitudes. Consequently, I must admit with all honesty and humility that I consider agnosticism, rationalism and appreciation of arts more important.'

Sundaram was one of the most favourite poets of B. K. Thakore. B. K. Thakore advised him of his own accord to read some of Maharshi Arvind's poetical works. But he would not advise him to compose poems under Arvind's influence. He was temperamentally against all kinds of hero worships. He told Sundaram in plain words :

'I would not go to Pondichery with folded hands and bent head in order to pay my respects to Shri Aurobindo. Sundaram wanted to give him

'The riddle of the world' but he refused it. 'Take it away with you. I don't need it.'

From one point of view, B. K. Thakore was right. All he wanted was to be his own self all the time. And he would not allow to expose his creativity to the powerful influence of some another powerful personality. In the same way he avoided Rabindranath Thakur. He had a very high opinion of Manishanker Bhatt 'Kant'. But he was aware of the fact that if he tried to adopt Kant's style he would lose his own individual style. He decided to go along the way that was destined to be his and his alone.

In his last days he had become a lonely person. Moreover he was not keeping well also, there were some personal problems too. From the early age he was less communicative and he always preferred to hide his feelings. But in the last months he had to compromise in certain matters. When Niranjana Bhagat met him in 1951, B. K. Thakore asked him 'Is it not possible for you to find a job here?' but immediately he realized so he told : 'Go... you are a young man. You must be having many things to do. But if you remember an old man like me, then once in a while do drop a line.'

All the while he was surrounded by so many literary personalities - Umashanker Joshi, Sundaram, Chandravadan Mehta, Gulabdas Broker, Kishansimh Chavada, Yashwant Pandya, Bachubhai Rawat, Chunilal Madia, Niranjana Bhagat. All these writers loved and adored B. K. Thakore tremendously. He had secured his place in their families also but no one could enter into his lonely hunted heart.

If he had joined Indian National Congress or if he had managed to visit England for further studies he could have become a renowned political figure. But his priorities were different. He preferred his family to the country. So he started his career as a teacher and he continued this job till the last month of his life. He was not ready to compromise here. Similarly he was against Nanalal, K. M. Munshi from the very beginning. There was a meeting to pay homage to Nanalal and B. K. Thakore was one of the speakers. There also he told that if Nanalal had got recognition as a poet ten years later his poetry would have been different. He had not written against K. M. Munshi's novels but he was a very severe critic of K. M. Munshi's autocratic attitudes. B. K. Thakore was a strong admirer of democratic values which were inherited from Great Britain. K. M.

Munshi was directly related to the Congress party and he also took part in politics actively. But he was not ready to establish democratic values in the institutions like Gujarati Sahitya Parishad. So B. K. Thakore revolted against K. M. Munshi's autocracy. Lilavati Munshi, wife of K. M. Munshi, was under the wrong impression that B. K. Thakore had some interest in the literary institute. But this veteran critic was totally indifferent to such matters. He did not hold the presidential chair of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad in his lifetime.

Though he was against popular poetry, he tried to create an awareness for Gujarati Sahitya Parishad by giving lectures at various centres of Gujarat.

This lonely, frank, bold person died on 2nd January, 1952. If Gujarati literary criticism has become more honest, more frank, more bold, it is due to his strong, robust personality. People of Gujarat loved him and still love him, even though he had criticised Gujaratis very often.



3.

B. K. THAKORE'S POETRY

B. K. Thakore wrote his first poem in 1886 and he continued to write till the end of his life. He observed : 'A poet will continue to write (poetry), babble, challenge, sing and murmur (his songs) so long as his tongue continues to function. Though his poetic career lasted for six decades and a half, his creative output is comparatively small, and the number of poems that would stand the test of time is even smaller. Sursimhji Gohil 'Kalapi', who died at a very young age, was a prolific poet. But as a poet he exercised very little or no influence on his contemporaries or successors. Unlike Kalapi, Kant wrote very few poems but he has a lasting influence on Gujarati poetry. Each of B. K. Thakore's contemporaries had a distinct individual style. Narsimhrao Divetia's poetry was composed under the powerful influence of English romantic poets. Kalapi's poetry with a deep melancholy note running through it at times, had a special appeal to the hearts of younger men and women. Nanalal sought his inspiration from the traditional, medieval and folk poetry and he wrote beautiful songs. Kant's poetry with its unique blend of the narrative, dramatic elements, is characterised by its strong sensuousness, sanskritized diction and concrete universals. Let us now try to understand what place Thakore's poetry occupies in this period.

In one of his little known poems Sundaram attempted to give a poeticized introduction to B. K. Thakore.

'A gentle heart throbbing in a body as strong as the stone; a gentle fascination enwrapped in the rough and arid outer cover of poetry; one finds it difficult to allow himself to be carried away with the flow of his metres; for one has to cross a number of steps to reach the current and hence he finds it difficult to swim in it; many would simply not dare to cross the first step out of sheer fear'.

B. K. Thakore was not unaware of his own limitations as a poet. The poetical ideal acceptable to him was only to be found in Kant's poetry. And

he thought it better not to accept Kant's model for the fear of losing his own identity. He strongly objected to the poems of Nanalal and Narsimhrao, which could easily be set to music; for he wanted to save his poetry from being popular. Ramanlal Desai, a well-known novelist of the succeeding Gandhi era was very popular among the young. He had the habit of putting quotations from Nanalal and Kalapi at the beginning of each chapter of his novels. This shows that inspite of all his poetic excellence not even Kant was as popular as Nanalal or Kalapi. And B. K. Thakore could never bring himself to accept Kalapi's sentimentality. Hence he tried to carve out a singular path for himself. In his poem 'Navya Kavita' (New poetry) he spelt out his own ideal :

म्हने च्हाशो? ना हूं ललित ललकारावलि तरल
नहीं च्हाशो? हूं तो हृदय उत्तरं ते मछि सरल.
म्हने च्हाशो? ना हूं तो परिचित पदालंकृत पटल;
नहीं च्हाशो? हूं तो मरम समझाये द्युति विमल.
म्हने च्हाशो? ना हूं प्रभु भजुं चमत्कार गजबे
नहीं च्हाशो? हूं तो कुदरत रहूं मोहि अजबे.
म्हने च्हाशो? ना हूं द्रवुं सुरविलासाद्भुत रसे;
नहीं च्हाशो? हूं तो पिगळुं जगना अंध हवसे.
म्हने च्हाशो? ना हूं जडबल जयालेखन करूं
नहीं च्हाशो? हूं तो मृदुल रतिरंगे दृग हरूं
म्हने च्हाशो? ना हूं गत समय जाजवत्यथि हसूं;
नहीं च्हाशो? हूं तो उडि उडि ज भावि प्रति धसूं.
महाकाव्यो जूना कवियन अने वंदुं सहुने
नवे काळे तो ये कवन नवलां सर्जि दउंने.

(Would you care to love me? Mine is not the verse gently cooing like the volatile verses. Would you not care to love me ? For my poetry is simplicity itself once it finds its way to the depth of your hearts. Would you love me? Mine is not a poetic web decorated with a known diction. Would you not love me? I am pure light once you get at my essence. Would you love me? I do not pray Lord awed by His miracles. Would you not love me? I am the one fascinated by the wonderful nature. Would you love me? I do not narrate the wonderful adventures of gods. Would you not love me? I am very much affected by the blind carnal passions of the world? Would you

love me? I do not depict the victories of brutal forces of the world. Would you not love me? I will bewitch your eyes with the delicate colours of Eros. Would you love me? I am not pleased with the grandeur of the past. Would you not love me? I am the one who takes a long flight right through the future.

I bow down to all the great epics of the past and all the poets. But should I not present to you new poems in this new age?)

If we use Sanskrit poetical terms, B. K. Thakore's poetry is not Drakshapak but Narikelpak. It means that this poetry is not easily grasped, it is not sweet and lucid, but once understood it is full of vitality and brilliance. It is only when the reader has a carefully cultivated taste and enough patience to read his poems again and again he would be able to enjoy.

Very soon in his career, B. K. Thakore earned for himself the reputation of being a poet-critic who is very difficult to be pleased. Many poets, right from Umashanker Joshi to Niranjan Bhagat, were much more impressed by his poetic theory rather than his poetry. All of them were very much eager to get recognition from him. Hence poets from far and wide used to come to B. K. Thakore with their poems. And he used to keep himself abreast of the work of his contemporaries and lose no opportunity of voicing his candid opinion regarding them. At one place he criticises very harshly the state of current poetry.

'Much that goes under the name of poetry offers only a facile reading and pleasing only the populace. Let me then ask you, O worthy connoisseur, is poetry merely a musical instrument? Much that goes under the name of poetry is only craving for and adding to one's own cheap popularity. Let me ask you, o worthy connoisseur, is poetry merely a form of factful flattery? Much that goes under the name of poetry is simply weak and sentimental wailing; only an empty ostentation, a fake iridescence; (it is) only a result of jugglery with language. And poets move about with their bosoms swelled with cheap applause earned through singing in their verses only that which is acceptable to the common folk. But the poet is held as a sage, a teacher, a messenger of God, is this true or not? If poetry be a goddess par excellence and if it safeguards the culture, whose is the function, to discern the right from the wrong and the good from the bad? And is it fair, after all, to brand such discerning critics as arch villains and damn them beyond redemption?

B. K. Thakore's poetical work may be divided into four categories -

- i) Poems expounding his own conception of what is poetry.
- ii) The sonnet sequence 'Premno Divas' (Day of love) revolving round the central theme of conjugal life.
- iii) Reflective poems.
- iv) Occasional verses.

'Bhanakar', B. K. Thakore's masterpiece, tells about the creative process. It is one of the most beautiful poems of Gujarati language.

આઘે ઝૂમાં તટઘુમસ જેમાં દ્રુમો નીંદ સેવે,
વચ્ચે સ્વપ્ને મૃદુ મલકતાં શાંત રેવા સુહાવે;
ઝંચાનીચા સ્તનઘડક શાં હાલતાં સુપ્ત વારિ,
તેમાં મેલે તલ સમ પડે ઝપડે નાવ મ્હારી.
માથે જાણે નિજ નરિ જુવે કાંતિ તો સૃષ્ટિ સૂતી
ચોંકી જાગે, કુસુમવસને તેથિ જ્યોત્સ્ના લપાતી;
ને બીડેલાં કમલ મહિં બંધાઈ સૌંદર્યઘેલો
ડોલે લેટે અલિ મૃદુ પદે, વાય આ વાયુ તેવો.
ત્યાં સૂતેલો લવું નવલ અર્ધા અનાયાસ છંદ,
કે ડોલંતી ગતિ પર સજૂં બીનના તાર મંદ,
તેમાં આ શી - રજનિ ઝરથી, નર્મદા ઘ્વંનમાંથી,
સ્વર્ગગાની રજત રજ, કે વાદલી ફેનમાંથી,
- પુષ્પે પાને વિમલ હિમમોતી સરે, તેમ છાની
બાની મીની નિતરિ નિગલે અંતરે શીય, સેહની!

Before saying anything about this sonnet, it is necessary to comment on the date of this poem.

In his diary, the entry of 16-8-1888 records two poems. Prof. Thakore writes : 'I have sent these two pieces to Manishanker (Manishanker Ratnaji Bhatt 'Kant'; one of the finest poets of this period.) to day for criticism freely expressing the small value I attach to them.' (A Diary part I, 1888).

These two pieces are very inferior to the poem 'Bhanakar'. The reader will find it very difficult to accept the fact that after writing a very beautiful poem how can one write such mediocre poems?

In this famous sonnet B. K. Thakore points out the creative act which connects formlessness with form, so he uses two images - the fog and the tree. The poet has preferred a particular time - that of midnight. There is no one except the poet. The persona is silently moving in a boat. There are three types of creativity : The river which is a part of Nature; The woman - the mother and the poets' creativity. Moreover we find here a number of opposites - motionless and motion; distance and proximity, formlessness and form; states of dream and watchfulness. B. K. Thakore has used sensuous images and thereby he has given a concrete form. In the second half he is talking about the poetic creation. The poet creates the word from rhythm. He is referring to some mystic elements in poetic creation also.

As compared to this sonnet, other poems dealing with the same theme are simply mediocre. B. K. Thakore voices in them certain ideals and norms derived from his reading of the world poetry. We can happily note here that his conception of what is poetry that emerges from these poems does not essentially differ from his literary criticism.

B. K. Thakore has not advocated subjective poetry wherein the poet goes deep down into his own self and expresses his intimate thoughts, feelings and experiences. He says : 'I have not composed these poems in the solitude of the dark recesses of my heart. Subjectivity very often may run the risk of being sentimental. But B. K. Thakore also has written this type of poetry rich in emotional content. Later on he destroyed most of these poems. He honestly confessed that he had tried to realize the purpose of his life through poetry. In one of his poems he said :

'My friends are asking me to share worldly pleasures but I would not allow myself to be caught in these snares. Gone are those worms who care for and love worldly pleasures only. They simply do not know what real pleasures are. They are vainglorious and are devoid of the splendours of the soul.' According to B. K. Thakore everything is ephemeral except fine arts.

B. K. Thakore rejected purely subjective poetry with its propensity for being sentimental and harping upon the self again and again. And he had plenty of examples of this kind of poetry before him. Hence he chose to be the champion of more objective type of poetry. He was a great admirer of Kant and held Kant's *Khandkavyas* in great admiration for

being the finest examples of objective poetry in Gujarati literature. He says in his poems 'Sacho Kavi' (a true poet).

'A true poet is at peace with himself. He has a mellow sensibility for he sympathizes with the feelings of his innumerable friends. He nurtures these feelings and accords them a free play in his poetry. Only a true poet can infer and express the thoughts of his fellow being, create a beautiful world of his own, peopled with men and women of flesh and blood and delineate interesting incidents involving them and thereby giving us a true poem. Such a poet may or may not get the acclaim of the masses. Cheap sentimentality, savoury sweetness, plainness, confusing verbosity are some of the qualities of popular poetry. B. K. Thakore consciously avoided them. In one of his poems he addresses popularity :

'Look, the doors are wide open, go whenever you please. I do not need even a drop of sympathy.'

B. K. Thakore was happy in his convictions and he always felt righteous pride as a poet.



'Premno Diwas' (The Day of Love) :

A sonnet sequence par excellence

Premno Diwas is the title of the sonnet sequence that has earned B. K. Thakore a permanent place in the history of Gujarati Poetry. It takes up as its theme the various stages of life a couple passes through the sweet and sour experiences that the couple has in the course of years. The relationship as thought of in the Indian context is never based on mere carnal satiation and mutual utility. Of course the physical aspect of the relationship is never undermined, but it does not definitely end at that. The sonnets in this sequence are infused with high lyricism. But they are not direct allusions of personal and intimate feelings. Thakore creates two characters and recreates one of their very intimate moments and experiences of their conjugal life. Thus the sweet nonsense they cooed in each other's ears in the first days of their life together, the one taking a huff and the other trying hard to placate; the birth of their first child and so on, form the subjects of these sonnets.

As a general rule Thakore never describes the physical charms of a

woman in his poems. But 'Vama' (The woman) is an exception. Here he delineates a lovely and lively image of a young woman. The young man is stunned with the ethereal charms of this crystalline doll. The blood running through the blood veins of her body reminds him of a real topaz. Even a fresh rose looks only pale before the youthful radiance of her face. Under the spell of her bewitching charms, he accosts her a bold question :

अे टीखळी मृदु मुखे सुखस्पर्श धन्य
कोना थशे मलपता? कदि? बॉल वामा!
अे स्पर्शथी शरम ने सुख केरि लाली
अे पोखराजि मुखडे अरविंद रंगशे,
ने अे सुधामद रगे रग उत्पंततां
वामा बिलोरि पुतळी उंचकाइ जाशे.

He utters this question inspite of himself half in wonder, half in dazed amazement! Who will be the person fortunate enough to have his lips moist with a divine kiss on your playful mouth? Do tell me, o you damsel. The young beauty is both shy and happy when she hears this question and her face becomes radiant with joy and bashfulness. The poet says that on observing the unuttered invitation writ large on her face the young man would just lift her up in his hands quite unconscious of what he is doing.

In 'Premni Usha' (The Dawn of love) Thakore describes what happened on one morning very recently after their wedding.

पाखी सेंथी निरखि रहिती चांदलो पूर्ण करवा
ओष्ठो लाडे कूजन करता, 'कंथ कोडामणा हो,
वल्ली वायू रमत मसती गेल शां शां करे जो!
त्यां द्वारेथी नमि जइ निचो भावनासिद्धि दाता
आय्यो छूपो अरव पद, जाणे चहे चित्त सरवा,
- ने ओचिंती करझडपथी बे उरो अेक धातां!
कंपी डोली लचि विखरि शोभा पडी स्कंधदेशे,
छूटी ऊंचे वळि करलता शोभवे कंठ होंसे
'दहाडे ये शू?' उचरि पण मंड्या दृगो नृत्य करवा,
'अे तो रातो दिन फरिफरी ऊर उपड्या करे छे'
गायूं पायां जिगरे जिगरे पेयूषो सामसामां,

न्हैं त्यां चांदा सुरज हजि, अे प्रेम केरी उषामा

Having done her hair the young wife was just trying to put the vermilion mark on her forehead while looking at a mirror. Of course that she was looking at a mirror is made manifest not at the beginning. Instantly her lips begin to coo, perhaps in coy expectation quite unconsciously : 'Look dear! just look the breeze and the creeper happily engrossed in their playful love.' At this very moment the young husband stealthily enters the scene from behind. He is a connoisseur of love and wishes to give her a pleasant surprise and unexpected delight. He takes her into a passionate embrace all in tenderness. What follows is the reaction of the wife which is described with the help of a string of just five bare verbs. She was thrilled, swayed a little, stooped and leaned, her beauty (hair) got spread on her shoulder. She got separated but girdled her delicate creeper like arms around his neck in hopeful earnestness. Of course she says : 'What this nonsense in the broad daylight?' But her eyes begin to dance expectantly and it is clear that she does not mean what she says. They both are in fact in the twilight of love which lies beyond the cycle of time.

Naturally, they can not live in this twilight of love for all the time. Another sonnet 'Adrashtidarshan' (Invisibly visible) is a letter written by the husband. Nowhere in the poem Thakore states the reason why they are not together. But it is certain that a considerable period of time has elapsed since their marriage and the reason why the wife is away from her husband is not quite a happy one. Perhaps there has been a quarrel or a misunderstanding between the two over a trifle matter.

व्हाली, तारो स्वर मधुर आ कानने संभळाय,
व्हाली, त्हांरां मृदु ललितथी चित्त अत्रे हराय;
न कैं कामे पडि झुबि तदाकार होऊं तिहांये
ओचिंती रे परि सम हवामां तरे स्पष्ट सोहे
मूर्ती त्हारी, अधर धरती छेल्लि चूमी सलामे
आंखो आडी करत चडतूं आंसु संताडवाने
अेनी सामे नजर ज ठरी जाय ने याद आवे
आघीपाछी अनुभवघडी, जे न भूली भुलाये
संयोगे जे उछळत सुखो पाइ पाइ पीघेलां,
ने आपत्ती, विषम पडतां स्नेह अंके वसेलां;

તારાઓ ને જરિ ચમકતાં વાદલાંજૂથ જેમ
સાથે જામે રજનિનભસે, આ બધી ચિત્ત તેમ
સ્વપ્નાં આવાં ઘડિ પછિ શમી જાય ને પ્રશ્ન મૂકેઃ
વ્હાલી, ચિત્તે તુજ કદિ હુબે સ્નેહસંભારણે કે?

Even during this state of separation from the wife, the husband finds her very much present before him in his heart. He keeps on hearing her sweet words even in her absence. The title literally means 'Seeing not with eyes'. And the poet makes a very skilful use of the contradiction inherent in the title. Even when he is busy with some work the fairy image of the wife as if comes floating in the air quite unexpectedly before his wife's undying affection for him, for even in her illusory appearance. She wears his last parting kiss on her lips and tries to hide the tear lurking from her eyes by turning her face away from him. And the memories of many other incidents too come flooding his mind at random. The husband can somehow bear the pangs of the separation only with the help of these sweet memories. And at last the question pops up into his mind. 'You too feel yourself lost in the sweet memories like me?' But the husband knows how irrelevant the question is : for he knows her answer before his mind has even formulated the question. The word 'darshan' used in the title is also significant. All the association connected with the word are suggested here. For him, his wife is not only a woman but she is a divine body.

In another sonnet of this sequence the poet presents a letter from the wife. The sonnet titled 'Junu Piyarghar' (old parental house) is a gem of sonnets in Gujarati poetry. Poets like B. K. Thakore do have an uncanny ability to enter into the deepest recesses of the minds and hearts of other people. They can describe how other people feel and what they think. The poet successfully has found out the objective correlatives of her emotions.

બેઠી ખાટે ફરિ વઢિ બધે મેહિયો ઓરહામાં,
દીઠાં હેતે સ્મૃતિપદ બઘાં ઝકલ્યાં આપ રૂઢાં
માઢી મીઠી, સ્મિત મધુર ને ભવ્ય મૂર્તી પિતાજી,
દાદી વાંકી રસિક કરતી ગોસ્થિથી બાઢ રાજી;
સૂનાં સ્થાનો સજિવન થયાં, સાંભઢૂં કંઠ જૂના,
આચારો કેં વિવિધ ઢબનાં નેત્ર ઠારે સહુનાઃ

भांडू न्हानां, शिशुसमयनां खटमितां सोबतीओ
ज्यां त्यां आवी वय बदलि संताय जाणे परीओ
तो ये अे सौ स्मृति छबि विशे व्यापि ले चक्षु घेरी,
न्हानी मोटी बहुरुपि थती अेक मूर्ती अनेरी
चोरीथी आ दिवस सुधिमां अेवि जामी कलेजे
के कौमारे पण मुज सरे बाळवेशे सहेजे!
बेसी खाटे पियरघरमां झिंदगी जोइ सारी
त्यारे जाणी अनहद गती, नाथ मारा, त्हमारी

Now the wife has come to her parents', home and she is not describing her emotions only; she is representing an Indian family. Though the poet is well-conversant with the world history, he has never forgotten the Indian tradition and the people. Here the wife's mind is full of the memories of the married life. The old parental home is not just a lifeless construct of bricks, mortar and so on. It is a living entity for her.

She sits on the bed, she goes upstairs and into balconies. She had left here a precious treasure of memories, associations, she is not at ease. All those memories of childhood, early youth are returning to her slowly and without any effort. Each of the nooks and corners of the house is throbbing with the living past, and she begins to see visions as if in a trance. There she finds her majestic father, her sweet mother, her grand mother bending down from her waist who used to tell very interesting stories to the children. All these delicate details pieced together present a true and a pleasing picture of a traditional Indian family.

Now she sees her childhood companions, she even begins to hear their voices. But now the force of the present begins to make its present felt. In this fairyland atmosphere, one figure imperceptibly and mysteriously comes to occupy the centre of the stage, and that figure is presented here in detail. We are not told about the identity of the figure but afterwards we come to know that, that figure was of her husband who had stealthily joined the band of her childhood companions in the guise of a young child himself. Since their wedding, he has overwhelmed her mind so much that he becomes a living past of her childhood also. Hence the husband appears and occupies the central place amongst her childhood companion. And at this stage, at the end of the sonnet we come to know that she has described all these in a letter to her husband. While sitting on a bed at the parental

home she realizes the bewitching charm of her husband. By this way the poet is suggesting that when she joins her husband her love will be more intense and ardent.

This poem is the ideal specimen of an elevated poetic quality without any embellishment or stylistic devices.

Another poem 'Vadhamani' (Good News) is also a beautiful poem and it is also praised by many critics. The wife is at her parental home for her first delivery and she is sending a letter of good news to her husband after the childbirth.

व्हाला म्हारा, निश दिन हवे थाय झंखा त्ममारी
 आवो आपो परिचित प्रतीती बघी चित्तहारी,
 दैवे जाणे जलगहनमां खेंचि लीघी हती ते
 आणी स्हेजे तट पर फरीने म्हने छोळेठेले;
 ने आवी तो पण नव लहू कयां गइती शि आवी,
 जीवादोरी त्रुटि न गइ तेथी रहू शीष नामी
 ने संस्कारो गत भव तणा ते कनी सर्व, व्हाला
 जाणू साचा, तदपि अव तो स्वप्न जेवा ज ठाला,
 माटे आवो, कर अधरनी सद्य साक्षी पुरावो,
 मीठा स्पर्शो, प्रणयि नयनो अम्रतालाप लावो
 बीजू, व्हाला, शिर धरि जिहां 'भार लागे शुं?' कहेता,
 त्यां सूतेलुं वजन नवुं वीती ऋतू अेक व्हेतां;
 गोरं चूसे अखुट ज रसे अंगुठो पद्म जेवो,
 आवी जोइ, दयित, उचरो लोचने कोण जेवो?

The poet wants to immortalize the most important, pleasant and auspicious moment in the Indian woman's life. After childbirth the womanhood reaches its zenith. It becomes clear from the first line that she is writing a letter. After a long span of pregnancy and the child birth, she is longing for her husband. So far she remained preoccupied with the future, she kept thinking about her unborn child. She passed through expectations, unknown fears and now she wants to experience her husband's love once again. All those moving, intense and sweet memories of the conjugal love are not unknown to her but she wants to recapture the past.

The Indian woman does not consider the experience of the first delivery in terms of physiology only, for her the experience is mystic also. It seemed to her that the destiny had pulled her into deep waters, she did not know whether she would come out safe and sound or not; the destiny has sent her back to the shore for the deepwaters; and she does not remember where she had gone or how she has come back. As she is a true believer, she thinks that the God had saved her life and she expresses her gratitude. Moreover she feels that all the experiences of the past life do not belong to this life but to the previous life and therefore they are no more their dreams.

In the second half of the poem, Thakore creates another world of sensuous images. She wants to experience carnal pleasures once again. As she is writing a letter she can become a little bit bold. When her husband took her hand at the marriage ceremony it was the first physical experience. Remembering that experience she asks assurances in the form of kisses, embraces from her husband, she wants to hear his sweet fondling words full of ambrose. Now she gives him the good news and writes : 'In my lap, where once upon a time you had kept your head, is sleeping our child. The child is sucking the lotus like toe, I request you to come and tell me that his eyes are after your or mine'.

In this sequence, there is one more piece 'Varshani Ek Sundar Sanj' (One beautiful evening of the monsoon) which is different from other narrative and dramatic poems of this section. Both the husband and wife are taking a walk on a raining day. They sit in a Malatimandap and enjoy the rain. After some time the rain stops; no raindrops, no bubbles in the collected rain water. There is a lake which looks like the sky amidst the hills. The stars are overhead, all of a sudden the raindrops start falling from heavenly lustre, the moon rises. Both of them look at her, she utters and with full of joy : 'Dear one, have you seen the moon?' Her words envelop the whole mountain area, the beautifully sky. The husband shows her the highest peak covered with snow, which looks like a temple of lord Shiva.

In these poems the love of this couple reaches to the highest level, the earthly love becomes transformed into the heavenly love of the Lord Shiva and Parvati. The diction of these poems is very simple and lucid. The poem has captured the moments of this couple very successfully. These moments are happy moments of married life.

There is another group of B. K. Thakore's poems which contains some kind of thought at their core. The term 'thoughtful' or 'meditative' is often used in Gujarati literary criticism to describe a dominant trait in his poetry. He forcefully advocated 'thoughtful poetry' to save Gujarati poetry from extreme sentimentality, ornateness, and its easy renderability to music. But he knew it very well that mere thought content is no assurance of poetic excellence. We do not know whether the famous remark of Mallarmé that 'Poems are written with words, not by thought' was reached him or not; but at the age of fourteen B. K. Thakore's intimate friend Manishanker Bhatt 'Kant' also had come to realize that for poetry language is more important. B. K. Thakore was also a man of genius. So he must have learnt from his experiences as a poet. He used another word 'Dhyarth' (ધર્મી + અર્થ) as an alternative to 'thought'.

The most outstanding works of this group are a sonnet sequence called 'Sukhadukha sonnet mala', and 'Aarohana'. The sonnet sequence is delineated from the point of view of a man who has reached a ripe old age. As Niranjan Bhagat has rightly observed that poems depicting youth and youthful love abound in literature but poems depicting old age are comparatively very few. The fact that B. K. Thakore continued to write poetry till the end of his life is significant from this point of view. What he seems to have realized at the far end of his life is expressed in the following line :

'The true wealth and happiness is that of Aatmaa only.'

Some times this poet expresses in one pithy line the tragic lot of human beings without being sentimental.

A beaming lass becomes an unfortunate widow.

In his later poems B. K. Thakore turns towards history, culture. 'Aarohana' (Ascending) and 'Chowpatine Bankadethi' (from the bench at Chowpati) belong to this group. Umashanker Joshi has observed some close parallels between Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' and B. K. Thakore's 'Aarohana'. For reasons we can not trace this parallel in detail. The protagonists of the sonnet sequence 'Premno Divas; (Day of Love) arrive at the snowclad top of a mountain at the end. Similarly the protagonist of 'Aarohana' climbs up a high mountain. The opening of the poem is very dramatic :

'O dear, my heart, where are you? What path climb you at the moment? Do you have a companion with you or are you all alone? And do the dear eyes that in the past always sparkled brightly still wear their original charm or are they little bit dimmed because of the fatigue.'

A reflective poem always runs the risk of heading towards dry prosaic qualities. B. K. Thakore begins the poem with a series of rhetorical questions which make it both lively and captivating. The structure and complexity of the poem make it clear that by 'Aarohana' the poet does not mean an act of physical climbing; it is the cultural ascending also. The protagonist wishes to climb up to the top which is the ultimate goal of his life. Climbing is his thirst, his life. He just can not live without climbing. Having reached a peak, the protagonist observes the play of the forces of nature. On his way up he meets some persons pretending to be Sadhus and a couple of rare souls that have realized the ultimate truth after years of austerity and penance. Very often the poet misses his beloved companion. Now the road ahead becomes more difficult as there are no clear cut steps for him to climb. He often comes across the footprints of the wild beasts and the sun becomes more and more scorching. The world of colours and sounds is now left behind. He has crossed the worlds of emotions, senses. He sees the remains of some ancient civilization. And a serious doubt begins to rock his mind whether this ancient Indian civilization will one day be fossilized as the one depicted in the epics of Homer. Will the Indian subsoil be dotted with the churches or will there be no religion whatsoever and there be nothing but stark materialism? The poet asks a very disturbing question -

O will the society in future be only materialistic? Will that be so in India ever as elsewhere?

And an unrelieved gloominess envelops his mind. The enthusiasm with which he had begun his ascent now leaves him completely. Only the old resolve keeps forcing his feet forward. He seeks solace in broad philosophization.

'O Natraj, the supreme dancer in the form of time, let your divine sport continue uninterrupted. Let there be deluge on earth! And let a new millennium with one more Manu Commence thereafter! Thou art in thy divine joys and hast all the strings firmly held in thy fingers!

B. K. Thakore did try his hand at writing long poems but none of his

attempts bore fruits because he had not completed any of the poems. One noteworthy piece is *Ek Todeli Dal* (A broken branch). His contemporary Nanalal wrote a number of narrative poems and songs about heroism and love. B. K. Thakore also wrote about the same theme and planned a long poem. Its hero has already left for the battlefield, but the poem begins with a description of his lovely wife. And the poet describes the immediate past. The protagonist was taking his wife's leave. He asks his beloved to request Teji, his mare, to take care of him in the battlefield. As soon as the mare hears her name, she lifts up her neck and starts waving it. The poet gives us a beautiful picture of the mare :

पड्युं श्रवण नाम, गर्वभरि डोक ऊंची करे,
तिहां झट थइ सवार हसि फेरवी घोडली;
करी तिलक भाल, वरमाळ कंठ आरोपि ते
स्विकारी जरि नाचती, सखी नयन राचती
वियोग न कळावती थइ अलोप अे घोडली

The hero saddles on the mare, his wife puts a vermillion mark on her forehead and puts on a flowery wreath around her neck. The mare dances while accepting this, she looks into the wife's eyes and trots away very fast from the place as if trying to save her from the pangs of separation.

Here the poet makes use of a series of verbs in quick succession to suggest even if only indirectly, the turmoil of the battle to ensue. By these verbs the poet creates dynamic, concrete images.

The old folks, the women and the children who are left behind in the fort then gutter and talk about the battles of the past. Here also the poet gives us a concrete picture. As a result we get a lively, vivid and dynamic atmosphere.

While hearing these tales the war spirit began to swell in the hearts of the children and the women; but the wife of protagonist is all alone; she remembers many deaths, seen by her, but her husband, who might have soothe her, is not here. She, that was as tender as the bud and was greatly perturbed with incessant crying, becomes quiet at last. And finally she takes refuge in the lap of night.

The tradition of reflective poetry takes on a richer line at the hands of Umashanker Joshi and Sundaram. But most of the reflective poems of B. K. Thakore are only occasional compositions. As he had a live interest

in history, some of his poems centre round historical events. Surprisingly enough he has written a few poems in the lighter vein which is quite alien to his personality. Of course here he is excelled by some later poets. The reason why his creativity as a poet evinces a sharp decline in the later years is his marked inclination towards criticism during that period. When we think about his entire poetical work we can not fail to notice its characteristic features.

B. K. Thakore's contemporaries were experimenting with a newer form of the poetry - *Gazal*. Kalapi, Manibhai Dwivedi, Sagar, Balashanker, Tribhuvan Premshanker wrote under the influence of Persian and made this form very popular. Even Gowardhanram Tripati tried his hand at this form in his epoch making novel '*Saraswatichandra*.' B. K. Thakore carefully abstained himself from writing popular poetry. He would not like poets catering to the taste of the common populace. He could never bring himself to write a *Gazal*. But he wrote a number of exquisite sonnets and greatly contributed to the development of the sonnet in Gujarati poetry, made this form very popular. As a result, the sonnet is no longer considered a foreign form transplanted into the Gujarati language. It is assimilated and naturalized into the native tradition of Gujarati poetry.

His another contribution is in the field of poetic diction. Barring a few poems the diction he employs in his poetry differs greatly from the diction of contemporary poets. The poetic diction employed by Kant, no doubt, was adopted not only by the contemporaries but by the poets of next generations also. B. K. Thakore tried to swim against this popular current. He is a lone crusader. The classical metres of Sanskrit poetics were abandoned by other Indian languages. Nanalal tried '*Apadyagadya*' (non-verse, non-prose) which was a bold step in getting rid of classical metres and by this way he tried to abandon Sanskrit based diction. B. K. Thakore also wants to do such an experiment. His diction is not Sanskrit based, he uses a mixed vocabulary and day to day language. It seems that he wants to use the spoken language, sometimes this spoken language is used in the poems with classical metres. But he could not become popular poet due to his mixed vocabulary and farfetched syntax. Umashanker Joshi, Sundaram, Ramnarayana Pathak and others are quite impressed by B. K. Thakore's poetic theory, not by his diction. But his ideal behind his typical diction was to fill the gap between poetry and the common man and the new generation of poets was moved by this ideal. In

Gandhian era the poetry finds a larger audience; and as a result of this, the distance between the poetry and the common life gets reduced. B. K. Thakore knew very well that due to this distance literature would find meagre nourishment. He himself has declared that - 'Most of the poems are only playing with the words.' According to him excessive importance to technique will result into dryness, insipidness.

As a corollary to his theory of poetic diction, B. K. Thakore tried to bring about a fundamental change in metrical expressions. In fact he aimed at fathoming the possibility of evolving in Gujarati poetry what in English is commonly known as 'free verse' or 'verse libre'. He disregarded caesura and endrhymes, punctuations at the end of metrical lines. He did not abide by the composition of the stanza form or Shloka. He found Prithvi of classical Sanskrit metres quite pliant to mould it to his requirements. And thus he introduced fluidity to expression in metrical composition and left a lasting mark on Gujarati prosody. Poets of succeeding generations took this cue and it was Sundaram who consciously and extensively experimented with the possibilities thus hinted by B. K. Thakore in the use of Prithvi, and Umashanker Joshi discussed and elaborated upon the concept of free verse in his critical writings.

B. K. Thakore's enthusiastic supporters and harshest critics easily agree on one point. It was Thakore who was the most important source of influence that guided and shaped Gujarati poetry after the third decade of the twentieth century. His perfectly exquisite poems are quite few in number. They are Bhanakar and a few poems from 'Premno Divas' sequence. As compared to B. K. Thakore, Nanalal is a prolific poet. He has written some of the most beautiful songs in Gujarati. But he could not change the direction of Gujarati Poetry. B. K. Thakore changed this direction radically. The poetic diction after B. K. Thakore's experiments could not just remain the same as it had been before. Umashanker Joshi had rightly pointed out that Gujarati poetry had two alternatives : one was the direction of Nanalal's 'Vasantotsav' and another was the direction of B. K. Thakore's 'Aarohana'. Many poets could not succeed in following Nanalal. Though B. K. Thakore's road was unknown and risky, most of the poets preferred his road. This poet's creative and influential personality and the successive poets' understanding were responsible for this preference.



B. K. THAKORE'S LITERARY CRITICISM

The later half of the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of the literary criticism in Gujarati literature. The same is the case of criticism in other Indian languages also. The close parallels in the development of Gujarati literature in general and poetry in particular on one hand and Gujarati criticism on the other hand afford rare opportunity to trace and evaluate their mutual interdependence. Narmad and Navalram were both poets and critics. Moreover, they were also wellread in other disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences. Thus begins a tradition in Gujarati criticism that is impregnated with a deep concern not only for poetic values but also for social and cultural values at large. For obvious historical reasons the creative literature and the literary criticism of Narmad and Navalram Pandya were heavily influenced by English romantic writers. The acquaintance with Sanskrit poetics also increases but the conceptual clarity was lacking.

But the literary criticism of Pandit Yug enters into a new phase. As we have noted earlier, the poets and critics of this age were totally convinced that creation and criticism have no meaning unless we understand and assimilate the rich traditions of Indian literature and culture. T. S. Eliot's views on tradition had yet to reach Gujarati language and literature. Some inner conviction seems to have led the men of letters in Gujarat to adopt views which are parallel to Eliot's views. Moreover, the cultural traditions were no less important to them than the literary traditions. Hence they tried to enrich literature by freely drawing on history, philosophy, ethics and other social sciences. Art for art's sake or a poetic theory which disregards the reader was quite alien to their thinking and such theory would hold no attraction to them. The very temperament of the age demanded that aesthetic problems be discussed in a wider context.

During this period the scholars and creative writers started translating Sanskrit classics. Bhalana, one of the poets accepted the

challenge of translating Bana Bhatt's *Kadambari* but afterwards no such effort was undertaken. Even in reformatory period i.e. Narmad's and Navalram Pandya's period very few translations will be found. Pundit Yug produced a number of enthusiastic and reliable translators such as Manilal Dwivedi, Chhaganlal Pandya, Nagarji Pandya, Keshavlal Dhruv, Hari Harshad Dhruv, Balwantraji Thakore, Kilachand Bhatt and they translated many classics of Sanskrit poetry and drama. Simultaneously some other writers started translating literary works from Bengali and Marathi. And thus began the tendency among Gujarati writers to bring the best literature from every corner.

In Pundit Yug Ramanbhai Nilkanth, Anandshanker Dhruv and Balwantraji Thakore were chief literary critics and among these, B. K. Thakore was the most impressive and influential critic not only for contemporaries but for the posterity also. We have already noted the reasons behind his tremendous influence. From the very beginning he favoured historical and comparative approaches in literary criticism. Before discussing this into detail one more point is to be considered.

During the medieval period mainly Bhakti literature was flourished not only in Gujarat but all over India. As a result of this, the common man remained in constant touch with literature. But as we draw towards the modern age the poets begin to turn their attention to other subjects as well, more and more educational institutes start establishing. In Europe one finds new theories of poetics and aesthetics as a result of Kant, Hegel's philosophy but no such efforts will be found during 18th or the first half of 19th century. But as soon as we became conscious of our limitations, efforts were being made to fill the gap. Only Education was not sufficient, but it was necessary that people should develop taste for literature and arts. B. K. Thakore believed very firmly that people should develop a taste for poetry also. He joined with others to civilize people in this field. To achieve this purpose one should not satisfy with stray attempts but one has to undertake the job seriously and continuously. All the literary and cultural activities should be undertaken accordingly. Moreover, one has to develop courage to criticize people very harshly for their shortcomings. B. K. Thakore follows Narmad in this regard. In Narmad's time people were reading literary works out of mere curiosity, they did not have sufficient knowledge of other subjects. Sometimes we feel that in the current age of mass media, the gulf between art and life is increasing, so

every now and then one must make sincere efforts like B. K. Thakore to cultivate taste in the people. He found that the common man was lacking in intellect and this drawback was found in some writers also. So he rejected sentimentalism in poetry and advocated the poetry rich in intellectual elements, thought content. If poets are without vigour and fire, the readers will also become weak and spineless.



B. K. Thakore's first collection of critical essays 'Kavishikshana' was published in 1924. The title page carries an apparently unpoetic couplet which states his basic concern as a critic.

'The teacher of poetry does not aim to produce poets but the teaching of poetry has aim to make you a sensitive and learned reader.'

Here there is a faint allusion to a well known Sanskrit verse of Mammatacharya which states that the teachings of a guru can make you a Pundit but not a poet. The following quotation clearly states how B. K. Thakore intended to educate his readers with the help of teaching poetry.

'A beginning has now been made in our country of imparting higher education through one's mothertongue and the teaching of poetry will eventually take roots here and flower. But nothing of the sort can be seen at present. Every writer stumbles and falters when he first crosses the threshold of poetry. Some of them keep on stumbling again and again. And more and more pages of the everincreasing number of magazines and books published are filled with works that abound in errors and blunders which could have been avoided very easily. Much is written and published but hardly do we find a work which is invested with a quality of brilliance and performance that compels us to read it again and again. Translations and adaptations also tend to miss the beauty of the original so it becomes very difficult to render the original power and beauty into Gujarati language. Of all the forms of literature the plight of poetry is the worst. Poems teeming with all kinds of imperfections and devoid of tangible substance are as numerous as petty insects at the onset of monsoon; these poems are worse even than many amorphous filthy short stories that fill the pages of our magazines. The most deplorable thing about this is the fact that the same poet writes and publishes a very good

poem and a very bad poem simultaneously. This shows clearly that poet himself can not discriminate between what is good and what is bad; some poets write good poems but they neglect blemishes in other poems. It seems that there is a complete anarchy that prevails in literary criticism and as a result of this, one is unable to differentiate between good qualities and bad qualities in Poetry.

(‘Kavitashikshana’ 2-3)

In other words, in the absence of objective criteria for judgment, no theory of criticism can hope to gain a widespread acceptance. B. K. Thakore finds practical criticism useful for his purpose. He quotes a number of poems to drive his argument home and compares with meticulous care various translations of the same work. In this way he sets up an ideal of what criticism ought to be, how it should proceed with its task and with what results. Of course we can say that B. K. Thakore was not after all facing a situation that was quite unique in itself. Every writer and critic finds himself more or less in the same predicament in every age everywhere. Longinus, Anandwardhan, Abhinavgupta, Coleridge, Mathew Arnold, I. A. Richards and many other felt similar dissatisfaction in their own age in much the same words and vein. That is why we have remarked earlier that every age must produce at least a handful of critics who try fearlessly and tirelessly to uphold certain fundamental values in arts and literature. Navalram Pandya, a predecessor of B. K. Thakore, had criticized some poets’ ‘verbal diarrhoea’. B. K. Thakore also complained about this tendency. He wondered many times why so many do write poetry. They should cultivate the fields of history and translation’. Sometimes he ridicules them also.

What is, then, the way out of this difficult situation? B. K. Thakore here agrees with what Sanskrit critics had said many centuries ago. We must always read the best poems again and again. We must criticize our works as objectively as possible. Many times excessive praise stifles the creativity of a promising poet. So B. K. Thakore advises a young poet to be on his own guard. If he finds his poems not upto the mark, it is always safe and wise to trust one’s own judgment and to disregard others’ praises.

This also provides a justification for undertaking translations of literary works from other languages on a larger scale. According to B. K. Thakore this activity is commendable for many reasons. Parochial pride

for our own language need not imprison within narrow walls of our literature. He says :

‘The history of every language has its own period or periods of translations and it ought to have much more frequently. When one language witnesses a large scale flowering of talents and its literature begins to emit newer light, other languages start receiving the vitality and fire from that enriched language. If the language and its speakers are more enriched, live and having a cultivated taste they are full of curiosity about other literatures and they are potential enough to quench others’ thirst. This language and its speakers start translating major works as early as possible. On the contrary an undeveloped, weaker language and its speakers are always afraid of others, they try to keep away from others; and sometimes take advantage very secretly, lest other people may find a low opinion of their independent capabilities.’

(‘Kavita Shikshana’ - 16)

This shows clearly that B. K. Thakore did not want to confine himself within Gujarati literature. During his time Gujarati poetry was influenced by Sanskrit, English and Persian literatures, but he was not satisfied by these influences. As with German poet Goethe his ideal was that of world literature. Hence he wishes us to accept all that is best not only in English and other European languages but also in Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Hebrew and so on. Umashanker Joshi says in one of his earlier poems :

‘Having ceased being an individual, let me be a citizen of the world and smear the holy dust of the mother earth on my head.’

B. K. Thakore foreshadows Umashanker Joshi’s sentiments in the following words :

‘We too have to blossom ourselves from being a Gujarati, an Indian and an Asian into being a citizen of the world and assimilate into the very texture of our being all that is beautiful, grand and magnanimous. Life is nothing but the development of love, sympathy and friendship for all; and the accentuation of the spirit of alienation from and disgust for others means death.’

(‘Navya Kavita’ - 21)

Provincialism and other separatist forces are rampant in the world

today. False national pride had given rise to fascism and the whole world had tasted its bitter fruits. And still we seem to be heading towards it again. B. K. Thakore was a student of history. He knew very well the forces that were responsible for the decline and fall of many civilizations. By temperament he was very curt, dry and tough man. But he grew sentimental inspite of himself when he appealed :

'Let us decide very firmly to accept what other countries and periods of history have to offer us. That is exactly what constitutes a truly new spirit of adventure in a human being. O you connoisseurs of the art of Gujarati poetry and beauty, treat narrow mindedness and intellectual stagnation as a real weakness. Take a dip into the holy waters of world art which is charming as well as very vast; compare the works of our own writers with the vast body of world literature and let us try to make it worthy of occupying a suitable place of pride there. Only that poet is truly great whose creativity has a universal appeal and acceptance. The rest of the poets are only regional, they last only for one or two decades, their fame is confined within their own language. Let us hope that such poets grow in Gujarat also.'

(*'Navya Kavita'* - 22)

A critic who holds such views would naturally advise poets not to crave for easy popularity. When we write only for our contemporaries and our native speakers we are doing the greatest harm to our literature. One must praise the best in our literature but it is of no use to shower praise upon praise for mediocre literature. A people that rates an average poem very high loses its poetry ultimately. Moreover there are some poets who cater to the wishes of readers; such sham and pseudo poets can be found in a great number.

We have noted earlier while discussing his personality that he was a lonewolf. This tendency develops with his growth as a critic. He did not care about public opinion. He wrote in detail about Gowardhanram Tripathi's '*Saraswaticandra*' but he did not write much about K. M. Munshi or R. V. Desai. Those writers who crave for popularity, consider themselves as the pillars of literary world. Such pseudo writers tend to push genuine writers to the wall and they contaminate the whole atmosphere.

B. K. Thakore suggests the remedy for such a sorry state. It is very

necessary for developing a healthy atmosphere to give respect to others' opinions. In no literature there should be a dominance of a handful of critics. This brings authoritarianism in literature. In his words 'Criticism then begins to overpower creative literature' and as a result of this creative atmosphere becomes unhealthy and polluted. Sometimes critics try to impose their own norms, values and concepts upon contemporary creative writers and thereby they try to assert themselves. Those who follow them are rewarded in every sense and those who do not are neglected and swept aside. But he was of the opinion that 'poets are themselves the authors of their fate. How can criticism after all dare to raise a pseudo poet to the rank of a great poet and not recognize a true poet?

One can get an impression that B. K. Thakore wished to belittle the importance of the common folk. We can not form an idea of what poetry is on the basis of average poetry. In the same manner it is not possible to form an opinion of human mind on the basis of an average mind. But if we carefully leaf through B. K. Thakore's critical essays we shall soon realize that he attached no less importance to the life of the common man. At one stage, he quotes Bernard Shaw : 'Let no man dare to create in art a thing that would not have existed in life.'

An average Gujarati reader of B. K. Thakore's time could not enjoy his poems. But this great critic never wished the bridge between Literature and people be broken. On the other hand a popular novelist like K. M. Munshi postulated clear cut dichotomy between art and life and advocated art for art's sake. As a result of the systematic study of world history B. K. Thakore could find the inner harmony that existed among the great age and its people. According to him Literature and life are interdependent and complimentary to one another. If they are separated from one another, both lose their essential charm and richness. Again even a writer of exceptional genius is the product of his own age. B. K. Thakore says :

'When matured the voice of the people can have its progeny in the form of works of literature. They are the permanent expressions of the voice of the people.'

He has driven this point home in many of his addresses. 'Life is the perennial source of literature. It gets all the nourishment it needs from

life only. Equally true is the fact literature should repay its debts to life. It makes life more worth living by making it more beautiful, more adorned, more rich and so on. An artist is not one who would sneak away stealthily from the problems and battles of life and from the joys and sorrows, from the success and failure it offers to us. This is the reason why literature can not be evaluated by keeping it away from life. We can separate literature from life only when we can separate the lustre from the pearl. Literature exists throughout life, it exists for life, it is the spiritual evolution of life.

Though modern art and literature have tremendous achievements many people believe that by creating a gulf between art and life modern art lost its lustre. B. K. Thakore goes one step ahead and says that when the intellect loses contact with common people it becomes empty. So many examples can be found in the history for this.

B. K. Thakore had no soft corner for K. M. Munshi as a person. But here we are concerned with B. K. Thakore's objective grounds. K. M. Munshi, like many others, very often harped upon the glory of our ancient culture. This novelist was all eloquence for the glory of our Indian culture in his works. But B. K. Thakore's approach was basically different from that of K. M. Munshi. He refrained from being sentimental and adopted an objective stance. Past glory is no cure for present misery. In fact we have to find out our own ways to solve our miseries. Hence B. K. Thakore observed with humility and firmness.

'Indian people and culture do have great qualities. We have had to our credit a number of achievements and successes in the course of our long history. But we have shouted at the top of our voice about these achievements again and again. We have praised ourselves so many times that not only this world but a score of worlds would get bored while listening to our praise. These praises are not going to last by shouting again and again, what needs to be done urgently is to make ourselves the right heir to our glorious past by trying to understand our limitations, weaknesses and to find out means to circumvent them in our march forward in new direction.'

(*'Navya Kavita'* - 52)



B. K. Thakore had a great faith in the efficacy of the historical and comparative methods of criticism to create a healthy literary atmosphere. He traced the origin of Gujarati lyric poetry as back as Narsimh Mehta; And according to him the first poet to write under the influence of English poets was Narmad and not Narsimhrao Divetia as generally believed at that time. B. K. Thakore used to compare Gujarati poetry with other poetry and was quick to accept limitations of Gujarati poetry without any reservation. His conception of poetry was greatly influenced by the western tradition of literary criticism beginning from Plato and Aristotle. Without attempting to define poetry he merely enumerates some of its essential qualities.

‘Only that poetry is best which is simple, sensuous, rhythmical, radisant, impassioned and profound. Here simple does not mean artless and straightforward, but lucid and prominently beautiful; ‘sensuous’ not just pleasing senses but incorporating in it the best and noblest of all the themes perceptible through senses and which is imaginative; sculpturesque, picturesque, variegated, concrete; rhythmical means the stream of words which is quite pleasing, in other words which has structural harmony; radiant means vigorous, impassioned means heart-rendering, profound means that which leaves a permanent impression and this is only possible if it is sublime.

(Lyric - 8)

It is time that it never suffices merely to give a list of adjectives like this. B. K. Thakore never tried to give a systematic and full exposition of his theory of poetry. As we have seen earlier he strongly emphasized a rich thought content in poetry with a view to saving it from sentimentality and its propensity for lending itself easily to musical rendering. We must not forget here that before B. K. Thakore there were Narmad and Manilal Dwivedi who had advocated such poetry. But B. K. Thakore waged a war for the cause of this kind of poetry and his own poetry came to be taken as synonymous with it. And this ‘idea’ forms a basic tenet of B. K. Thakore’s conception of poetry and his theory of criticism. But if we peruse further it will appear that thought means vision, perception according to him. What he really aimed can not be as simple as that, what he had in his mind was the quality of concrete sensuousness in poetry; this thought content should be enriched with strong emotions articulated with the help of creative imagination.

The personal preference and prejudices of a critic vitiate his criticism in the first place and contaminate the literary and critical atmosphere of the language at large. B. K. Thakore strived hard to rise above his personal likes and dislikes throughout his career as a critic. The objectivity of a scientist was his ideal in criticism. We must, therefore, accept all that we find best in other languages. A writer's taste must be catholic. Simultaneously he must also be discrete enough to reject something which is quite good in itself but may not suit with the total design of his work.

The reason why B. K. Thakore remained a dominating influence for more than two generations, is obvious. He never compromised. He criticized not only his predecessors but also his successors. He had a high respect for Narsimhrao Divetia as a man but this respect would not deter him from criticizing Divetia as a poet. Gujarat rated Nanalal, who composed many beautiful songs, very high during his lifetime. But B. K. Thakore was of the opinion that it would have been better for Nanalal if recognition had come later in his life. B. K. Thakore did not agree with his contemporary poet-critic Ramanbhai Nilkanth on many points. This poet mocked at Manibhai Dwivedi, a great scholar of ancient philosophy, by caricaturing him in his comic novel 'Bhadrambhadrā'. B. K. Thakore could not tolerate this type of freedom in the name of art; one should not allow such non-literary activity in the guise of literary activity. But on the other hand he gave credit to Ramanbhai Nilkanth for his comparative studies in western and Indian poetic theories.

N. G. Joshi, a renowned Marathi scholar, rightly observed 'The secret of his (B. K. Thakore's) true greatness, his conception of poetry, his aesthetic significance and his zeal for achieving something totally new and unprecedented is his originality.'

B. K. Thakore's criticism greatly differs from that of his contemporaries or his successors. Perhaps they were more scientific in their approach and had more depth. Dr. Harshad Trivedi, an acknowledged expert on B. K. Thakore's works, has pointed out many limitations and contradictions. But in spite of everything B. K. Thakore had been a dear 'Ballukaka' to Gulabdas Broker, Yashwant Pandya, Chandravadan Mehta, Chunilal Madia, Kishansimh Chavada, Umashanker Joshi, Sundaram, Niranjana Bhagat, Bachubhai Ravat and

many others. The style of criticism was characteristically his own, fully vibrant with his personality. Niranjana Bhagat said that according to Baudelaire criticism should be passionate, prejudiced and personal. B. K. Thakore's criticism can meet Baudelaire's demands to great extent. In his works, one can find such criticism everywhere. According to him there is no dearth of sycophants who are adept in the art of using endearing words and who lavish inordinate praises on anything and everything; but the critic, who has courage and integrity to utter in no uncertain words that this thing, this charming toy can be anything but a poem, is rare in every language.



5.

OTHER WORKS BY B. K. THAKORE

Catholicity of taste, a wide range of scholarship, open-mindedness - these are some qualities which B. K. Thakore had shared with other pundits of his age. His contributions in the fields of history, culture and sociology are quite valuable in themselves. He believed that life and only life is the source of the true strength of literature. And throughout his life he kept himself busy in activities which would directly or indirectly give strength to his criticism.

B. K. Thakore was a great editor. And his greatest editorial work is 'Aapani Kavita Samriddhi' (A collection of Gujarati poetry). Here his aim was to help establishing a fine rapport between readers and some of the best poems in Gujarati literature. With exactly the same aim in mind he started contributing regular feature in a literary magazine called 'Prasthan' edited by Ramnarayan Pathak where he selected a poem and discussed it in detail. This he did inspite of being aware of the fact that even a balanced critic is liable to err when he undertakes to criticise a contemporary poem. And the poems he chose were more often then not by younger poets who might not have published their collections of poems. Some of the poems, chosen by B. K. Thakore, were quite ordinary and they are forgotten now. But it was quite significant in itself that a great critic like him carefully passed through literary periodicals. But the aim behind this editing was a little bit different also. He clarified his aim and design :

'Before they come to understand what a poem is and what is the art of poetry, our educated people must start reading as many poems as possible. Again the poems they read must not necessarily be the only one which are known and dear to their hearts. They must start reading the poems with a clean and deep understanding and with a spirit of generosity. They must have a sensibility enriched through constant comparing of the poems they have read. This and only this is first step in the right direction.

B. K. Thakore has not written a history of literature. But historians of literature find anthologies of carefully selected works very useful as a starting point. 'Aapani Kavitasamriddhi' sets up an ideal of what anthologies ought to be.

Sometime writers can not keep up old traditions. They would not like to have anything to do with traditional literature. B. K. Thakore, however, strongly believed that works from the ancient and medieval periods ought to be read again and again. He edited Vachak Manimanikya's 'Ambad Vidyadhar Ras' and Vachak Udaybhanu's 'Vikramcharit Ras'. In co-operation with some other scholars he edited a series of six medieval 'Ras' poems called 'Gurjar Rasavali.' Dr. Bhogilal Sandesara, a scholar of repute, praised the critical acumen and scholarship of B. K. Thakore as an editor. Two medieval works edited by him still await publication.

The large body of B. K. Thakore's translation work also has to be viewed in this context. The relevance of a writer's translation work can not be undermined if one wishes to evaluate the total body of his works with his predilection for the comparative approach in Criticism. B. K. Thakore could not but take up translation work in a big way. He made an unhappy choice and began translating Kalidas's plays - 'Shakuntal', 'Malavikagnimitra' and 'Vikramorvarshiya'. Unfortunately his style lacked the lucidity, grace and mellowness so essential for undertaking such a challenging task. Nevertheless we can not summarily dismiss those translations completely; he was constantly preoccupied with certain theoretical and larger problems involved in the task. Hence he went through four different versions of Shakuntalam; he studied scholarly 'tika' on Kalidas. Moreover he started reading Bana Bhatt, Bhavabhooti and Euripides, Shakespeare, Milton also. He had cultivated his taste by reading Greek and Sanskrit dramas and epics. Simultaneously he was well conversant with many Gujarati works of different times and types. This way he tried to master over the different levels of Gujarati language. Similarly he studied 12 different editions of 'Malvikagnimitra'. So is the case with 'Vikramorvarshiya'. Sometimes such translations became creative work also. His translation of Rehana Taiyabji's 'Gopihriday', for instance, is nothing less than a creative rendering of the original English poem into Gujarati. In order to remain faithful to the spirit of the poem and the devotional temperament of the poetess, he tried to keep aside his own agnostic personality. He had adopted a Russian comedy by Valentine

Keteyev called 'The Skaring the circle' which had met with boisterous success in America. His translation of these dramatic works show his genuine love for the form. He attempted to write an original play in Gujarati called 'Ugati Jawani' (Rising Youth) but it was a very weak play. Another original work was published in 1928, named 'Lagnaman Brahmacharya' or 'Samyoge Viyog' but it was also a failure.

Influences of medieval narrative literature and folk-literature are found in this play. He had included three songs also.

The short story in Gujarati language arrived a little bit late. B. K. Thakore also tried to shape this form alongwith other short storywriters. He published 'Darshaniyu', a short story collection, in 1924. 'Parisna Trana Chhokara' (Three boys from Paris) was not totally original but it became very popular. It was translated in Tamil, from Tamil it was translated into Bangala and again some one translated the same story into Gujarati from Bangala. This collection contains some original works and some adaptations. It is very noteworthy that in 1928 he had used a device of fantasy.

Two volumes of his diaries are published and other volumes are waiting for publication. He had started writing diary from 1888. He had written personal memoirs, some historical views, his opinions about friends, relatives without any hesitations. This diary was written in Gujarati and English. His thoughts recorded on 2nd February of 1890 are noteworthy :

Thus if it is a combination on the political plane we are after, what we have to do is to create this spirit of organic nationality. We must revive our lost religious feeling and acquire and spread culture. What has been said about our present system of education is very unfair to it. Of course it is far from perfect. But this knowledge that we lack combination, this feeling that we must acquire the capacity of collective action, this consciousness of the causes which alone can bring it about, all this, what we do we owe it to, except to our education? Our ancient culture was other worldly and so, from the point of view of the world, was an end itself. That old end has fallen into disrepute and anther has not yet been set up in the natural consciousness to take its place. We are passing through an age of transition. We must not attribute the faults inherent in an age of transition to the culture of such an age.'

In 1944, Gujarat celebrated B. K. Thakore's diamond jubilee. To felicitate him Kishansimh Chavada and others published a volume named 'Panchoterme' (At 75). This volume contains B. K. Thakore's lectures and some of his autobiographical writings. One can see some parallels with the contemporary receptive theory of art or the reader oriented criticism. B. K. Thakore has extended the concept of creativity to criticism also.

Moreover B. K. Thakore continuously wrote about history, social problems of women. This shows that this creative writer was eager to fulfil his social responsibilities also.



6.

CONCLUSION

Gujarat is celebrating B. K. Thakore's 125th birth anniversary. We must evaluate his contributions and achievements in the present context. His work definitely withstood the test of time. He used to describe himself as nature's idiosyncrasy because of his rough and tough appearance. But his sweet mellowness has been experienced by a number of friends and writers who kept referring to it warmly. He is not free from contradictions. At times he seems to adopt a view that he should not be bound by his own past. But he was never a man to accept compromises on vital matters. He never accepted the presidential chair of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad. His views about women were far ahead of his time. He was deeply concerned about the fact that women were not getting their due in the society. It is unfortunate that he did not write a drama or a novel on this theme.

He was a prolific writer. But he did not write as a teacher or an academician. He planned to write a systematic history of criticism and to translate a number of works into Gujarati. But unfortunately his plans never materialized fully. He could not tolerate the lack of basic values or the prevalence of wrong values in life and literature. Whenever he found inadequacies he criticised them categorically. He was ready to accept weaknesses and limitations of Gujarati people.

Only the development of a taste for true art and literature and of a sensibility to match with it in a larger section of the people can help creating an atmosphere conducive to true literature. And throughout his life he strove hard to help creating such a healthy literary atmosphere in Gujarat. This is one of his basic concerns in most of his writings and lectures. He advocated a strong bond between people and literature but he did not entertain mediocre literature even if that literature is liked by most of the people. If some one remains silent against such type of literature it means recognition to that literature. It is for this reason that many

promising poets were afraid of him and they could dare to ask for his opinion about their works. But once the barrier is removed the young poet would find this tough, noncompromising critic full of love and warmth.

On the other hand if B. K. Thakore had not received the friendship, love and warmth from younger writers he could not have lasted. He continued his literary and educative activities to the end of his life. He did not choose to share his personal problems even with his intimate friends. His was a closely guarded world and he preferred to live accordingly.

The clamours of mass media and well-nigh the irresistible floods of cheap entertainment that go with them are now claiming more and more attention and our precious time. There is a growing apathy towards art and literature; in the field of literature itself, true literary values have been relegated to a position of no significance; groupism, favouritism among writers and critics have reduced criticism to a state of being blatant flattery. In such atmosphere there must be a cluster of literary giants like B. K. Thakore to preserve and promote a pure and healthy atmosphere of the literary world.



7.

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